



September 4, 2026

Mayor and Members of the Charles Town City Council
City of Charles Town
Charles Town, West Virginia

Re: Proposed Changes to OT-MUC Permitted Uses

Dear Mayor George and Members of the City Council:

On behalf of the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA), I am writing to express our concern with the proposed changes to permitted uses in Charles Town's Old Town-Mixed Use Commercial (OT-MUC) District that would make several existing automotive-related uses legally nonconforming and prohibit similar businesses from locating in the district in the future.

SEMA represents more than 7,000 businesses in the automotive specialty-equipment and aftermarket industry, the vast majority of which are small businesses. Our members manufacture, distribute, sell, and install products and services that allow consumers to repair, maintain, personalize, and enhance their vehicles.

SEMA recognizes and respects the City's desire to guide development in a manner consistent with its long-term vision for downtown Charles Town. However, we are concerned that categorically excluding automobile sales, quick-lube businesses, automobile care centers, automobile parts and service centers, and gasoline and service stations singles out one segment of the local economy based principally on the nature of the business rather than its actual impact on neighboring properties.

That approach would establish a troubling precedent. Automotive businesses are often locally owned small businesses that provide essential services, employment, and tax revenue to their communities. A well-maintained automotive repair shop, parts business, or dealership can operate compatibly within a mixed-use commercial district just as other commercial uses can. Conversely, virtually any type of business can create land-use concerns if issues such as traffic, noise, lighting, outdoor storage, or property maintenance are not appropriately addressed.

Rather than prohibiting an entire category of businesses, we encourage the City to address those concerns through objective, generally applicable standards. Requirements governing hours of operation, screening, lighting, signage, outdoor storage, noise, building appearance, and similar impacts would allow the City to protect the character it is seeking for the OT-MUC district without determining that automotive businesses, as a class, are incompatible with that vision.

We are particularly concerned about placing existing Charles Town automotive businesses into legally non-conforming status. Although these businesses would be permitted to continue operating, non-conforming status can create long-term uncertainty for property owners and businesses considering future investment in their facilities. The proposed one-year abandonment provision also means that a property that has historically supported an automotive business could

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permanently lose that use following an extended interruption. Over time, the practical effect would be to eliminate these businesses from the district.

The automotive aftermarket is an important part of both the Charles Town community and West Virginia's broader economy. In the Charles Town area alone, the industry generates approximately \$2.52 million in economic impact and \$861,000 in wages and benefits. Statewide, the industry generates approximately \$1.33 billion in economic impact, supports 5,368 jobs, and provides nearly \$347.6 million in wages and benefits, while generating approximately \$146.3 million in tax revenue. These are businesses and jobs that are deeply rooted in communities across the state and cannot simply be relocated to another state or replaced by online commerce.

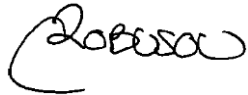
Charles Town should certainly be able to establish reasonable standards for development within its downtown. We believe, however, that those standards should focus on the characteristics and impacts of a particular property or proposed use, rather than broadly excluding automotive businesses from participating in the district's future.

We respectfully ask the City Council to reconsider the proposed automotive exclusions before taking final action and to explore performance-based standards that would accomplish the City's planning objectives without singling out automotive businesses or relegating existing employers to non-conforming status.

SEMA would welcome the opportunity to work with the City and its staff on an approach that protects Charles Town's vision for its downtown while allowing responsible automotive businesses to continue investing, creating jobs, and serving the community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roberson", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Senior Director, State Government Affairs
Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA)